The Old Sleigh.

"Lizabeth!"

"Coming."

"There, mother, old Speckle has returned thanks at last," holding up a plump, white egg that would do credit to any queen of the poultry yard:

"Well, I allers said that hen was thankful for past mercies, though your father would laugh every time I said so. Liddy Steven has jest been here; she wanted to see you, but you was gone so long I thought you must be down to Mis' Pennell's."

"Yes, I met her as she came through the yard."

"She didn't tell you the news, did she?"

"She told me Will Marston had returned from California."

"It does beat all 'bout that boy—seems jest like the piece o' poetry you read sometimes about the feller that went off and stayed so many years and then come back and took his mother out o' the the poor-house—only it's the father this time. 'The very worst of the deacon's six,' it called him, and that's jest what Will was then. I never believed he had anything to do with that scrape down to the village. Liddy says he's terribly rich, and is going to take care of his father; the deacon must be glad, for I guess he's stayed with Caleb most as long as he can comfortably. They say he's going to marry Sam Miller's darter Ruth. You see when Bob Miller went out there for his health Will found him out and done little kindnesses for him, and when he was too sick to write home Will wrote for him. Part o' the time Sam was sick hisself, so Ruth answered the letters, and he fell in love with her in that way. There didn't anybody but the deacon and the Millers know he was coming. Sam drove down to the depot and carried him up to Caleb's. Guess they was some surprised to see him."

There is no knowing how long Mrs. Allen would have gone on, her tongue keeping time to the busy click-clack of her needles, had not Mr. Allen's step, sounded on the walk.

'Lizabeth never talked much, and the mother did not mind her silence tonight. A slight quiver about the sensative mouth alone told how keenly the words were felt, and the sigh of relief which escaped at the welcome sound of her father's voice was lost in the noise made as he entered, stamping the snow from his boots.

"Why, father, does it snow? I ben so busy talking I haint thought to look out of the window for some time."

"Yes, it's begun to come down right smart; shouldn't wonder if it was good sleighing by to-morrow."

"You don't think it's going to be a long storm?"

Mrs. Allen's face had an anxious expression as she asked the question, for a long storm meant days of exile for her.

"No, I sh'll be surprised if it don't clear up by to-morrow noon—so's 'Lizabeth and I can take a ride to the village; that'll be a treat, won't it darter?" and the smile that lighted up his daughter's face pleased him better than any answer could have done.

Guess I'll get the old sleigh out. Ben Smart's ben down to the city, and he says he saw lots jest like it; it's five years since I sent Jim to the village for the new one, and it's never been out since. I'm glad it's coming into fashion again, for I never enjoyed myself complete in the new one—always felt a little above my station," and Farmer Allen's laugh rang through the sitting-room at the fitness of his remark.

"Well, 'Lizabeth, you get supper on the table, and I'll tell father the news while he warms his feet. He's ben down to the wood lot all the afternoon and hain't heard nothing of the strange things that has been happenning up here."

Having arranged things to her satisfaction, the stocking Mrs. Allen had dropped on the enterance of her husband continued to grow under her deft fingers, while the news lost none of its interest with repetition.

That night, after 'Lizabeth had taken her candle and said good night, Mr. Allen sat for some time looking at the fire, then suddenly broke out:

"Mother, don't you think 'Lizabeth looks kind o' peaked lately? Then she don't seem to eat as much as usual."

"There, father, you're always fretting 'bout that girl. I don't know what you'd a done if you'd had six like your brother Jonathan."

"I didn't know but the news about Will might affect her some. You know they used to think so much of each other."

"Massy, father! that was years and years ago, when they were children. 'Lizabeth's too sensible a girl to let a feller like Will Marston disturb her. When he stopped writing to her, she gave him up. She's worked hard today, and a good night's rest will bring her round."

There seemed nothing more to be said, so he took a light and proceeded to make everything safe for the night, but long after his good wife was asleep, he lay awake thinking of the pale face his daughter had lifted for the good-night kiss."

'Lizabeth was not likely to get the strength her mother thought from a night's rest. Until the first rays of morning lighted up the east she lay thinking of the old days, and living them over again. She could not remember the time when she and Will had not seemed to belong to each other. When they were children he had drawn her to and from school on his sled, saved her the largest half of his apple or orange, and fought all her battles with a vigor worthy of an old knight. When the years in their flight made them no longer children, it was always Will who, at the close of meeting or singing-school, drew her arm through his with an air of proprietorship and started for the Allen farm. After his mother's death he had not chosen his associates wisely, but in spite of scorn and opposition, without disobedience, she had clung to him and trusted.

Then came the affair at the village. One dark night a party of roughs had broken into 'Squire Peasley's barn, tied together the legs of all his hens, nailed up Whitefoot's stall, and then, climbing the roof of the ell, had placed a board soaked in salt and water over the chimney. The old gentleman, who lived alone, was obliged to travel on a slipery ground to the nearest neighbor for help. The villagers were justly indignant, and for punishing the miscreants, but no clue to them could be found.

Will was away from home that night, and suspicion rested on him as one of the party, until he could bear it no longer, and decided to go away.

It seemed but yesterday—their parting in the old trysting-place.

Will had slipped the tiny gold band she wore upon her finger—it seemed but a thread of gold now—asking her to wear it until he came back.

"For," said he, "I'll never come back till I can offer you a name and a home. Somehow, the devil has had possession of me lately, but bad as I am, I would scorn to do what they accuse me of—torture a feeble old man. While you believe and trust me, there are plenty who do not." And with a last "Good-bye, my Beth," he was gone. When the first letter came addressed to Miss Beth Allen in Will's round, boyish hand, Mr. Allen frowned and his wife scolded; but when she was for stopping the correspondence at once, he said:

"There, there, mother! let the girl write to him if she wants to; she won't do him any harm, and I can trust her for a true Allen not to go far out of the way."

So the matter had dropped, and for five years 'Lizabeth's letters were received without comment; then they ceased suddenly and unexpectedly. For months 'Lizabeth watched the mails with anxious face. Mrs. Allen shook her head with an "I told you he didn't amount to anything," whenever there was no one but her husband to hear, and Mr. Allen waited in silence.

Time does much toward healing such wounds, and five years had made it seem more like an unpleasant dream than a reality; when the news of Will's return came, awakening memories of other days.

For once Mr. Allen was weather-wise. The snow had fallen through the night, covering the earth as with a mantle; the feathery flakes continued to come lazily down until just before twelve o'clock, then there was a rift in the western sky, and when the old yellow sleigh stood at the door the sun shone as bright as ever.

"Be careful, father, and don't let 'Lizabeth get cold waiting for you," was Mrs. Allen's parting injunction as she came to the door to see them off.

There was just wind enough to lift the newly-fallen snow and send it in little whirls to lie sparkling and glistening a few yards from where it had fallen. Robin was in excellent spirits, and Mr. Allen declared as he drew up in front of the village post-office that the distance never seemed so short.

"Draw the robe close around you, darter, and don't get tired waiting. I've got to bargain with Sam Chase about that stove, but I'll be quick as I can; then we'll drive down to Burnham's and get the book you mentioned." With this and an extra pull to Robin's blanket, Mr. Allen was gone.

"Father was right, the old sleigh is more comfortable than the new one," 'Lizabeth thought, as she nestled down in one corner, drawing the robes more closely to keep out the puffs of wind that tried to find enterance at all corners. While tucking the robe between the cushion and the side of the sleigh her finger touched something smooth like paper.

"One of father's old receipts, he's so careless," she thought, with a fond smile, as she drew it forth for inspection. But a glance was needed to show her mistake.

It was a letter yellow with age, unopened and addressed to herself in the handwriting she knew so well. She could scarcely trust her eyes, but there was the familiar post-mark—San Francisco—and she was just leaning forward to read the date, when a gust of wind, taking it from her hands, deposited it at the feet of a gentleman who was passing.

She dared not look up, but in a moment he was handing it toward her, saying:

"Is this your property, Miss Allen?"

At the sound of the voice, so little changed that she would know it anywhere, the hot blood rushed to her face, and she had scarcely courage to reply:

"I think so. I never saw it before."

She felt the keen eyes search her face, and there was a touch of scorn in the question that followed.

"It is an old letter addressed to you, and you never saw it before?"

She felt as if she must vindicate herself, and her answer came full and clear.

"I just found it in the old sleigh. I do not know how long it has lain there."

He glanced again at the letter; it must be the same one; he knew the date so well. The tone was almost eager now.

"You never saw it before, Beth? You did not receive it, my last letter, and leave it unanswered?"

"Could you doubt me, Will?" She was was looking him in the face now.

"I might have known better, but you were always so punctual, and when I received no answer to my last letter I was too proud to write and ask an explanation. I thought you had given me up, like every one else in B——. Can you forgive me for my want of confidence? But he needed not words for answer.

When Mr. Allen came hurrying back the old sleigh had two occupants. It was some time before they could explain affairs to his bewildered mind, but when light began to dawn he exclaimed:

"It was that Jim; he's so careless! lost a letter for me once!"

Will was persuaded to accompany them home, and it was a very merry party that surprised Mrs. Allen by their early appearance.

As soon as possible Mr. Allen hurried his wife off to the kitchen to unravel the mystery, while Will and 'Lizabeth read and re-read the old letter by the light of the hickory fire.

What Ruth Miller would say was a source of much anxiety to Mrs. Allen, until one day Will remarked, much to her peace of mind, that Ruth had been engaged for some time to a friend of his in the West—a gentleman she met some years before while visiting in the city.

The house upon the hill Will and 'Lizabeth call home, and the old yellow sleigh—well, as Mr. Allen says, it's not every sleigh that can boast of a romance like that.—*Portland Transcript.*

The Ideal Home in the Country.

A writer in the Cosmopolitan magazine thinks there is no doubt that the ideal house of the future, whether large or small, will be in the country, and that this massing together of humanity to be found now in our great cities will come to be considered as simply barbarous. Even for the rich, who can claim fullest space, the city with its undercurrent of crowded, festering, noisome life holds unconscious contamination; while for the poor themselves, what word is strong enough to express the degradation of the ward home that is theirs?

Nor is it possible, even under the most favorable circumstances, to count "flats" or apartments as anything more than the travesty of comfort in its best sense. Ruskin is right when he denies to cities any possibility of the best development for human life; and, though they have their uses, and we could ill dispense with many good things to which they have given birth, they are responsible for such hideous evils that one longs at moments to see them, their pride, and their magnificence, and "the bitter cry of outcast" life in their midst, engulfed like those lost cities of old.

The home spirit is strong in many a city flat, and consecrates many a stately mansion as well as the narrowest tenement; but the true home must be in the country, quite accessable, it may be, from the city, but always owning certain indispensible and inalienable characteristics. The house that has not its own bit of land; its own possibilities in the way of garden or orchard, even if that orchard sum up as only one old apple tree, has not full right to the title "comfortable." Building associations all over the country are making building possible for even very limited incomes, and these associations are supplemented by work from our architects that gives us every form of inexpensive design, and proves that beauty and cheepness can go hand in hand.

The "Born-Tired" Man.

The fellow who was born very tired grew more and more weary as he went through the haps and mishaps of childhood, the adolescence of youth and the early period of manhood. At middle age he was the tiredest man then living. At fifty he was so utterly worn out with the simple process of existing that it occurred to him to calculate how many breaths he must draw if he went on living for twenty years more, and, being a man in fair preservation, there was a good prospect of his reaching the alloted threescore and ten years of average mankind.

Well, this tired citizen figured it out on the basis of eighteen breaths a minute, 1,080 to the hour, 25,920 to the day, 9,462,280 for a year, and 189,342,800 for twenty years. The figures appalled him, and he died in disgust and discouragement at the tremendous task of doing such an enormous amount of breathing.—*Chatanooga Times.*

FARM TALKS.

State Records of Agricultural Experiments Wanted—Pruning Fruit Trees—Cultivation of Orchards, etc.

It is to be regretted that the farmers in each State could not contribute every year a volume of their actual experiences, writes Ben: Perley Poore, in *The American Cultivator*. One of the first Patent Office reports, much of which was complied from information furnished by practical husbandmen, was really far more useful, in my humble opinion, than the long scientific dissertations from paid professors which Mr. Colman now gives us. Arthur Young, one of the ablest agricultural writers that ever lived, says: "The publication of experiments really made, faithfully related and sufficiently authenticated, is of great and important consequence to the public good. But the very reverse is the case with these books, which are published under the title of 'General Treatises and Systems,' comprehending more soils, articles of culture, etc., than any one man can experimentally have a knowledge of, consisting of the most heterogeneous parts, purloined out of former books on the same subjects without a common knowledge to discover the good from the bad. It has been said several times, and with very great justice, that what we want is a book of experiments. If any practical, intelligent husbandman, who occupied a farm, would only keep an exact register of all his business, such a collection would form, as far as it extended, a complete set of experiments. What we have are the author's reflections, instead of that which enabled him to reflect, and from which we might draw very different conclusions. The experiment is truth itself; the author's conclusions matter of opinion, which we may either agree to or reject according to our private notions."

It was formerly customary to prune fruit trees in March or April, but competent authority has recommended that this work be omitted until May, when the leaves are out, and by others still further to postpone it until the last of June or beginning of July. Against March and April pruning it is urged that the wood, where cut, is liable to crack, through the influence of the drying winds of those months, and being unprotected by foliage, that the sap is apt to exude and waste, and to corrode the lips of the wound; and that, at this season, the efforts of nature to heal the wounded parts are feeble. May pruning has been objected to for the reason that as at this time all the organs of the plant are in active operation, and the growth more vigorous than in any month of the year, pruning cannot be prejudicial. The sap vessels are at at this time full, and the sap pushing with great force to the extremities; and if the branches are materially diminished, the sap will force itself out near where its flow has been stopped, in numerous shoots, useless for fruit and unsightly to the eye. Those who have pruned at this season can judge what force there is in these objections. Most of our trees, and particularly fruit trees, have two periods of growth in a season, the first principally in May or June, and the other towards Autumn. Between these two periods their growth is in a manner quiescent. This is declared by many to be the best period for pruning, because the second growth suffices to cover the lips of the wound, or, when small, the wound itself, with new wood and bark; and, in the second place, because the volume and force of the sap are then so much diminished that few shoots or sprays are thrown out. I have tried the different seasons, and am of the opinion that the last-mentioned time has a decided preference. For three successive years I have pruned my orchard after cutting an early crop of grass, say the middle of July, and have witnessed none of the evils which have resulted from Autumn and Spring pruning.

I recommend to the cautious orchardist to do as I have done; try the three methods, and hold fast to that which does best. Experience is the best school in which to gain instruction, and it is the only school in which most of us are willing to learn.

I will give but three rules in regard to the operation of pruning an orchard, and they will be short ones.

Prune annually. If judiciously done, none but small branches will be required to be cut, and the wound of those will soon heal.

Make a clean cut, and pare smooth, with a sharp knife, the edges of the wound. This will greatly facilitate the healing process, and preserve the tree from decay.

When the habit of the tree will allow, take out the leading shoot, at the height where you design to have the branches spread. A horizontal branch will produce more fruit than and upright one.

The best application I have tried (and I have used it to advantage six or seven years) to kill bark lice upon the apple tree, to destroy larvæ or other insects, and to give a clean, healthy appearance to the tree itself, is a strong ley, made of wood ashes or potash. It is applied to the whole trunk of the tree, and branches if necessary, with a brush, nailed or tied to a stick a yard or more in length. The most suitable time to make the application is between the middle and last of May.

There are advantages and disadvantages in tilling an orchard. In tilled ground, trees are the most vigorous and thrifty, and it seems to be in a measure necessary to plow a few years to give the young trees a start. Yet even at this period great care is required not to cut the roots with the plow. But when the trees have acquired six or eight years' growth, and the roots become extended, still greater precaution is necessary, or the injury becomes serious. It is not altogether the larger roots that are so liable to be cut, for these are often below the plow, but the innumerable fibres that spread in every direction, which escape the plowman's notice, but which are literally the mouths that convey food to the plant. My practice is, when an orchard is to be plowed, to proceed first to dig the ground superficially with the spade about the tree, two or three feet in breadth, and as many yards lengthwise of the furrow, so that there shall be no balk, and to run the plow shallow near the dug part. And when the orchard is in grass, to dig circles round the trees after harvest, both to facilitate growth and to prevent injury in Winter from moles. There is no less caution necessary in using the spade than the plow, to preserve the roots entire. It is a good practice to cut the grass close with a hoe, and then to strew rotten chip dung—if mixed with a little lime the better—about the tree.

I fear that too many calves are just now finding their way to the butchers, but there are farmers who raise their own oxen and cows. It is for them to say what the calves they are now raising shall weigh three years hence. A large number of them will have to be fed on skim-milk, and if they are intended to be kept growing it will be with other kinds of food. And this additional food is cheap. Oat or barley meal is the best. Cook it in clean water, and when cold, mix a small portion at first, when the calves are ten days old, with the milk, and increase it as they grow older and demand more. Feed three times a day. With this treatment, if they are in good pastures, they will grow as rapidly as if running with their mothers. Do not feed so that when they are done they are ravenous for more, but give them as much as they want, and give it to them at regular stated periods, three times a day. Flaxseed boiled to a jelley, and a bit be once a day put in their food, is very beneficial. Any farmer can have this raised on their own farm, but if he depends on oil-cake meal it will be neglected. If they are in pasture, have a shed for them to go under in rain or cold wind. I insist, however, on calves having pure milk, warm from the udder, for the first ten days. It is best for the calves that it be milked and fed to them. But it is better for the cows to have the calves suck for ten days. One of the worst backsets in calves is to let them run with their mothers all Summer, and then wean them in the Fall on dry hay or unground grain. Without special care at this period they fall off in flesh, until they are not as good as the calves fed carefully on skim-milk and meal.

It has got to be that time of day in stock raising that a good farmer is ashamed to see about his premises poor, lean, starved calves. Such things give the lie to his professions of good farming or indwelling Christianity. It might have been done when they did not know any better. In those days it was contended that to raise calves and colts with hardy fare the first Winter made them hardy and healthy. But that senseless theory is exploded. High feeding is becoming more and more popular as the question is investigated and experimented. And this is especially the case with all meat producing animals. Early maturity by careful keeping is the lesson of wisdom in case of hogs and cattle. And in order to do this, special care must be taken of the calves and pigs.

Judge Buell once said that a well-kept kitchen garden is not an infallible prof of thrift, when seen near a farm-house, it is a pretty certain indication of comfort and good sense. It shows that the owner is well to live, and intends to live well, so far as his labor and his lands can conduce a good living. For it will not be denied that the farm and the garden may be made to produce, not only the substantials, but a great many of the luxuries of life—I mean those luxuries which, while they are grateful to the senses, neither pall the appetite, vitiate the taste, impair the health nor corrupt the morals of those who partake of them. Some consider the productions of the garden as constituting a necessary part of human food. So the man of the forest will tell us that bread is an unnecessary article of food, the Abyssinian that it is unnecessary to cook our meat, and many of the inhabitants of Asia would insist that it is impious to indulge in the use of animal food at all. But as none of these opinions are suited to our age and country, there is no use in combating them. The pleasures and benefits of a garden are so manifest that none who have enjoyed them are willing voluntarily to do without them. To have a succession of delicious fruits, plucked at maturity from the trees and vines which one has planted and reared, and to partake daily of fresh gathered vegetables from one's garden, the product of his labor, promotive alike of health and pleasure, are no mean gratifications; and yet they are privileges, I am too sorry to say, which, though all can enjoy, but few, comparatively, at present, do participate in.

Let me enumerate some of the good things, conducive alike to health and innocent gratification, which a garden may be made to produce with very little expense. Our perennial products, which require very little care after they are once established. I will name, of fruits, the strawberry (for these will be smothered by the grass on a well-conducted farm), the currant, gooseberry, plum, pear, quince, grape, and, in situations where they will thrive, the apricot and peach. But of fruits, I would have none but the best sorts; for the best are as cheap as the worst, are as easily cultivated, and are infinitely more healthy and grateful. These, if well selected, will give a succession of fruit from June to November, and in a preserved state during the year. Plants, to begin with, will cost from $3 to $5. They may be multiplied by grafting, budding, etc., by the boys or men of the family, without any expense. The trees should be so arranged as to shade as little as possible the grounds that are to be tilled. Half a dozen roots of the pie-plant (rhubarb) will furnish abundant materials for pies and tarts, little, if any, inferior to the gooseberry, from April to July, or until the fruit is sufficiently advanced to supply its place. These should be planted two feet apart in good soil. A bed of 40x3½ feet will supply the table with delicious asparagus during a part of April, and the whole of May and June, if kept in good order. For this the ground should be dug deep and made rich. The seed, which will cost a shilling, should be sown in drills ten or twelve inches apart, about the first of May; the bed should be kept free from weeds, and the ground forked in the Spring. The third year it will be fit to cut. Or roots may be bought at fifty cents the hundred, which will give a crop the second year. Plant them six inches apart in the drills. About 250 plants will fill a bed of the given dimentions. Among the perennials I may also class some medical plants and sweet herbs which are useful and necessary in the economy of a family, such as sage, thyme, hyssop, balm, rue, tansy, wormwood, etc., which it requires ten times the labor to beg from more provident neighbors than it does to raise in our garden. The annual products which go towards subsisting a family, and which are seldom produced but in the garden, are numerous, as the onion, beet, carrot, parsnip, cabbage, peas, beans, pot herbs, salads, radishes, squash, cucumber, melon, etc. Some of these are in use most of the season, and most of them afford valuable Winter stores.

These productions of the garden which I have named—and the list might be greatly extended—are all useful in the economy of a family. They afford a grateful variety, and tend to lessen, in no inconsiderable degree, the quantity of more solid and expensive food which would be required without them; and yet they may all be produced in sufficient quantities for an ordinary family on a quarter of an acre of ground, and without seriously abstracting from the ordinary labors of the farm. A garden is truly a matter of economy in a pecuniary point of view; but when I add to this consideration the comfort and pleasure which it affords, I am persuaded I am in the line of duty, in commending the subject to the particular consideration of my readers.

It is not my purpose at present to prescribe rules for laying out or managing a garden; yet I cannot forbear to suggest that the first step should be to enclose it with a good substantial fence, and to keep that at all times in repair so as effectually to exclude hoof and hog.

I have said nothing of the sale of the surplus products of a garden, although hardly any location is without a market for such products; nor have I noticed the ornamental department, because the wife or daughters will see to this; they will have their shrubery and their flower border.

To a Robin.

Robin, swinging, swinging
On the apple bough,
What joyous impulse thrills thee!
Entranced warbler thou!
Thy little throat is swelling
With the rapture of thy song,
Its wonderous music filling,
All the air as borne along;
Thy crimson breast is throbbing,
As though it scarce could hold
The wealth of love and gladness
That in thy song is told.
O tell me, tell me, robin!
I, too, would sing as thou;
Thine every note responsive
In my heart is echoing now
Till filled to overflowing
With its harmony divine
Would in melody exquisite
Burst forth in song like thine.

—*Annie C. McQueen*

Can't Travel Far.

Charity that begins at home seldom goes away without becoming homesick. —*Whitehall Times.*

Very Energetic.

Some of the recent Western cyclones appear to have been padded with dynamite.—*Boston Globe.*